

## "THE HUMAN SLAUGHTER HOUSE!"

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### CHAPTER X.

"Ha! Ha! Ha! Ha!" The laugh is full of horror, and mingles with the dying whine beyond. \* \* \* The laugh grows even louder, and even wilder, and laughs in triumph at the naked, pitiful dying, littering the ground.

"Drummers! Strike up!" shouts the voice.

"Uncover for prayer!"

We recognize him; he is a reservist belonging to some pious sect. A sergeant has seized him, and tries to hold him \* \* \* the captain has run up, but the madman tears himself away and runs ahead of them to a rifle-pit \* \* \* he stands aloft, a black, wild silhouette against the pale sky, and spreads out his arms in blessing over the sick night \* \* \* he stands there like a rapt priest, and raves, and is blessing the mangled darkness. "In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost."

Then arms seize him from behind and pull him down \* \* \* they drag him to the ground \* \* \* "Our Father" he howls aloud, and strikes and kicks out all round him, and goes on praying from his raging body until at length breath fails him \* \* \* they have tied him hand and foot, and have gagged him. \* \* \*

But now the Thing-that-couldn't happen—that none the less was bound to happen.

And when the voice calls out of it comes over me as if I had lived it all once before. \* \* \*

"Captain!" shouts the hard, naked, impudent voice we all know. "Haven't you got any cotton wool for us to plug our ears with?"

We have all turned round as if at the word of command. It is the militia-man, the yokel, standing fac-

ing the captain and gesticulating at him. "I only wanted ask if those are wild beasts, or if they're what we call human beings you've torn to pieces there?"

But curt and sharp, as we knew it, the rasping note of command responds:

"What the devil's the matter with you? Pull yourself together. Can't you hear? Get back to your place at once."

But then it bursts out, the voice of Nature, and responds so harshly, and tears down all barriers.

"Murderers!" roars a blasphemous mouth.

"Murderers of men! We shall have to knock them all on the head like dogs."

We all start as if under an electric shock \* \* \* that was what was on the tip of the tongues of all of us \* \* \* that was the climax that was bound to come \* \* \* we can not endure to go on lying in this charnal-house any longer. \* \* \*

"You mind what you're about." The other's wrath breaks out once more \* \* \* and then we know it for certain, the captain is a fool \* \* \* he has lost the game from the very start \* \* \* and now \* \* \* it is like a shadow play before my eyes \* \* \* like a ghostly cinematograph. \* \* \* I see that the militia-man has drawn his bayonet \* \* \* the captain is standing facing him with his revolver in his hand, and gives him an order \* \* \* he promptly gets a blow with the butt end of the rifle on his head that fells him to the ground without a sound \* \* \* and they leap up from all the trenches. \* \* \* "Murderers!" they cry. "Murderers! Kill them!"

There is no stopping it now. \* \* \* I feel I have gone mad. \* \* \* I do not know where I am. \* \* \* I see wild beasts all round me distorted unnaturally in a life-and-death grapple \* \* \* with bloodshot eyes, with foaming, gnashing mouths, they at-